

Redwater Restorer

"The voice of one crying in the wilderness..." (Matthew 3:3)

Volume 3

No.1

January 14, 2006

Objections To God's Plan Of Salvation Considered

Published By:

Redwater
Church of Christ

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When the topic of salvation is discussed, it is not unusual to hear certain objections to God's designated plan. At times, such objections result from a misunderstanding of the steps involved in the salvation process, or the reason(s) for those steps. On occasion, however, the objections result from a stubborn refusal to submit to God's commands regarding what constitutes salvation. I would like to consider three such objections.

Is Salvation the Result of "Baptismal Regeneration"?

Is the forgiveness of sins that results from being baptized due to some special power within the water? No. "Baptismal regeneration" is the idea that there is a miraculous power in the water that produces salvation (i.e., regeneration). An examination of the Old Testament (which serves as our "tutor" (Galatians 3:24)), and which contains things "for our learning" (Romans 15:4) provides important instruction regarding this principle. When Naaman the leper was told by Elijah to dip seven times in the Jordan River, at first he refused, but eventually obeyed—and was healed. However, there was no meritorious power in the muddy waters of the Jordan. Naaman was healed because he did exactly what God commanded him to do, in exactly the way God commanded him to do it.

This was true of the Israelites' salvation as well. On one occasion when they sinned, and God began to slay them for their unrighteousness, those who wished to repent and be spared were commanded to look upon a brass serpent on a pole in the midst of the camp (Numbers 21:1-9). There was no meritorious power in the serpent. Rather, the Israelites were saved from destruction because they did exactly what God commanded them to do, in exactly the way God commanded them to do it.

The New Testament presents the same principle. Jesus once encountered a man born blind (John 9). The Lord spat on the ground, made a spittle/clay potion, and placed it over the man's eyes. He then instructed the man to "go, wash in the pool of Siloam" (John 9:7). Was there medicinal power in Siloam's waters? No. It was the man's obedient faith that produced the end-result, not some miraculous power in the water. What would have happened if the man had refused to obey Christ, or had altered the Lord's command? Suppose the man had reasoned, "If I wash in Siloam, some may think I am trusting in the water to be healed. Others may think that I am attempting to perform some kind of 'work' to

'merit' regaining my sight. Therefore I simply will 'have faith in' Christ, but I will **not** dip in the pool of Siloam." Would the man have been healed? Most certainly not! What if Noah, during the construction of the ark, had followed God's instructions to the letter, except for the fact that he decided to build the ark out of a material other than the gopher wood that God had commanded? Would Noah and his family have been saved? Most certainly not! Noah would have been guilty of violating God's commandments, since he had not done **exactly** as God commanded him. Did not Jesus himself say: "*If ye love me, ye will keep my commandments*" (John 14:15, emp. added)?

Peter used the case of Noah to discuss the relationship of baptism to salvation (1 Peter 3). He stated unequivocally that baptism is involved in salvation when he noted that, just as Noah and his family were transported from a polluted environment of corruption into a realm of deliverance, so in baptism we are removed from the polluted environment of defilement into a realm of redemption. It is by baptism that one enters "into Christ" (Romans 6:4; Galatians 3:27), wherein salvation is found (2 Timothy 2:10). In Ephesians 5:26 and Titus 3:35, Paul described baptism as a "washing of water" or a "washing of regeneration" wherein the sinner is "cleansed" or "saved." [Baptist theologian A.T. Robertson admitted that both of these passages refer specifically to water baptism. (A.T. Robertson, Word Pictures in the New Testament, Nashville, Broadman, 1931, 4:607.)] The power of baptism to remove sins lies not in the water, but in the God who commanded the sinner to be baptized in the first place.

Is Baptism A Human Work?

Is baptism a meritorious human work? No. But is it required for a person to be saved? Yes. How is this possible? The Bible clearly teaches that we are **not** saved by works (Titus 3:4-7; Ephesians 2:9). Yet the Bible clearly teaches we **are** saved by works (James 2:14-24). Since inspiration guarantees that the Scriptures never will contradict themselves, it is obvious that **two different kinds of works** are under consideration in these passages.

The New Testament mentions at least four kinds of works: (1) works of the Law of Moses (Galatians 2:16; Romans 3:20); (2) works of the flesh (Galatians 5:19-21); (3) works of merit (Titus 3:4-7); and (4) works resulting from obedience of faith (James 2:14-24). This

Objections.... (Continued)

last category often is referred to as “works of God.” This phrase does not mean works **performed by** God; rather, the intent is “works **required and approved by** God” (J.H. Thayer, A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament, Edinburgh, T & T Clark, 1958, p. 248) Consider the following example from Jesus’ statements in John 6:27-29.

*Work not for the food which perisheth, but for the food which abideth unto eternal life . . . They said therefore unto him, What must we do, that we may work the **works of God**? Jesus answered and said unto them, This is the **work of God**, that ye believe on him whom he hath sent.*

Within this context, Christ made it clear that there are works which humans must do to receive eternal life. Moreover, the passage affirms that **believing itself is a work** (“*This is the **work of God**, that ye believe on him whom he hath sent.*”). It therefore follows that if one is saved **without any type of works**, then he is saved **without faith**, because **faith is a work**. Such a conclusion would throw the Bible into hopeless confusion! In addition, it should be noted that repentance from sin is a divinely appointed work for man to perform prior to his reception of salvation. The people of ancient Nineveh “repented” at Jonah’s preaching (Matthew 12:41), yet the Old Testament record relates that “*God saw their **works**, that they turned from their evil way*” (Jonah 3:10). Thus, if one can be saved without **any kind** of works, he can be saved **without repentance**. Yet Jesus himself declared that without repentance, one will surely perish (Luke 3:3, 5).

But what about baptism? The New Testament **specifically excludes** baptism from the class of human meritorious works unrelated to redemption. The context of Titus 3:4-7 reveals the following information. (1) **We are not saved** by works of righteousness that we do by ourselves (i.e., according to any plan or course of action that we devised—see Thayer, p. 526.) (2) **We are saved** by the “*washing of regeneration*” (i.e., baptism), exactly as 1 Peter 3:21 states. (3) Thus, baptism is excluded from all works of human righteousness that men contrive, but is itself a “work of God” (i.e., required and approved by God) necessary for salvation. When one is raised from the watery grave of baptism, it is according to the “working of God” (Colossians 2:12), and not any man-made plan. No one can suggest (justifiably) that baptism is a meritorious work of human design. When we are baptized, we are completely passive, and thus hardly can have performed any kind of “work.” Instead, we have obeyed God through saving faith. Our “*works of God*” were belief, repentance, confession and baptism—all commanded by the Scriptures of one who would receive salvation as the free gift of God (Romans 6:23).

Is the Baptism Associated with Salvation Holy Spirit Baptism?

To circumvent the connection between water baptism and salvation, some have suggested that the baptism discussed in passages such as Acts 2:38, Acts 22:16 and 1 Peter 3:21 is Holy Spirit baptism. But such a position cannot be correct. Christ commanded his followers—after his death and ascension—to go into all the world and “*make disciples of all nations, baptizing them into the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit*” (Matthew 28:18-20). That same command applies no less to Christians today.

During the early parts of the first century, we know there was more than one baptism in existence (e.g., John’s baptism, Holy Spirit baptism, Christ’s baptism). But by the time Paul wrote his epistle to the Christians in Ephesus, **only one** of those baptism remained. He stated specifically in Ephesians 4:4-5: “*There is one body, and one Spirit, even as also ye were called in one hope of your calling; one Lord, one faith, **one baptism** . . .*” Which **one** baptism remained? One thing we know for certain: Christ never would give his disciples a command that they could not carry out.

The Scriptures, however, teach that Jesus administers baptism of the Holy Spirit (Matthew 3:11; Luke 3:15-17). Yet Christians were commanded to baptize those whom they taught, and who believed (John 3:16), repented of their sins (Luke 13:3) and confessed Christ as the Son of God (Matthew 10:32). It is clear, then, that the baptism commanded by Christ was not Holy Spirit baptism. If it were, Christ would be put in the untenable position of having commanded His disciples to do something they could not do—baptize in the Holy Spirit. However, they **could** baptize in **water**, which is exactly what they did. And that is exactly what we still are doing today. Baptism in the Holy Spirit no longer is available; only water baptism remains, and is the one true baptism commanded by Christ for salvation (Ephesians 4:4-5; Mark 16:16; Acts 2:38).

When a person does precisely what the Lord has commanded, he has not “merited” or “earned” salvation. Rather, his obedience is evidence of his faith (James 2:18). Are we saved by God’s grace? Indeed we are (Ephesians 2:8-9). But the fact that we are saved by grace does not negate human responsibility in obeying God’s commands. Every person who wishes to be saved must exhibit the “*obedience of faith*” commanded within God’s Word (Romans 1:5; 16:26). A part of that obedience is adhering to God’s command to be baptized.

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